Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED

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No.

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States
OCTOBER TERM, 1996

REINERT & DUREE, P.C., GARY ROBBINS, ROBBINS & ASSOCIATES, INC., ESTES & ESTES, INC. AND JAMES C. LANDES,

Petitioners,

v.

DAVID A. SOSNE, BANKRUPTCY TRUSTEE FOR JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS, INC., DEBTOR,

Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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69 pp

QUESTION PRESENTED

I. Whether 11 U.S.C. §362 automatically bars a party from collecting property to satisfy a pre-petition judgment against the bankruptcy debtor, when neither the bankruptcy estate nor the debtor has an interest in that property?

LIST OF PARTIES

The names of all parties to the proceedings in the Court whose judgment is sought to be reviewed here appear in the caption of the case. There is no parent of subsidiary company of any party to be listed.

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DAVID A. SOSNE, BANKRUPTCY TRUSTEE FOR JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS, INC., DEBTOR,

Respondent.

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Petitioners, Reinert & Duree, P.C., Gary Robbins, Robbins & Associates, Inc., Estes & Estes, Inc. and James C. Landes respectfully petition for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

OPINION BELOW

The opinion of the Court of Appeals is reported at 108 F. 3d 881 (8th Cir. 1997) and is reproduced in the appendix at 2a. The unreported opinions of the District Court and the reported Bankruptcy Court opinions (175 B.R. 288, Bkrtcy. E.D. Mo. 1994) are reproduced in the Appendix at 45a, 15a and 26a.

STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

The Court of Appeals entered judgment on March 13, 1997. The petitions for rehearing, were denied on April 14, 1997. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. §1254(1).

STATUTES INVOLVED

11 U.S.C. §362

§362. Automatic stay

(a) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, a petition filed under section 301, 302 or 303 of this title, *** operates as a stay, applicable to all entities, of---

(2) the enforcement, against the debtor or property of the estate, of a judgment obtained before the commencement of the case under this title;

(3) any act to obtain possession of property the estate or property from the estate or to exercise control over property of the estate;

(4) any act to create, perfect or enforce any lien against property of the estate;

(5) any act to create, perfect or enforce against property of the debtor any lien to the extent that such lien secures a claim that arose before the commencement of the case under this title;

(6) any acts to collect, assess, or recover a claim against the debtor that arose before the commencement of the case under this title;"

11 U.S.C. §362(h)

§362(h):

"(h) An individual injured by any willful violation of a stay provided by this action shall section shall recover actual damages, including costs and attorneys' fees, and, in appropriate circumstances, may recover punitive damages."

11 U.S.C. §541

§541. Property of the estate

(a) The commencement of a case under section 301, 302 or 303 of this title creates an estate. Such estate is comprised of all of the following property, wherever located and by whomever held:

(1) Except as provided in subsections (b) and (c) (2) of this section, all legal or equitable interests of the debtor in property as of the commencement of the case.

***

(3) Any interest in property that the trustee recovers under section ***550 *** of this title."

11 U.S.C. §105

§105, Power of the court

(a) the court may issue any order, process, or judgment that is necessary of appropriate to carry out the provisions of this title. No provision of this title providing for the raising of an issue by a party in interest shall be construed to preclude the court from, *sua sponte*, taking any action or making any

determination necessary or appropriate to enforce or implement court orders or rules, or to prevent an abuse of process.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

During 1988 judgment was entered in favor of Gary Robbins, Robbins & Associates, Inc., Estes & Estes, Inc. and James C. Landes against Just Brakes Corporate Systems, Inc. (Just Brakes) for both actual and punitive damages as a result of fraud committed by Just Brakes. By October 1991, the judgment plus interest was valued in excess of $156,000. During January 1991 these judgment creditors, represented by Reinert & Duree, P.C., initiated several ancillary actions in state court to collect. On January 10, 1991 Just Brakes assigned all right, title and interest in its trademark and service mark "Just Brakes" to F.G.R. Management, Inc.

Under Missouri law, which applies to determine the nature and extent of a debtor's interest in property, *Butner v. United States*, 440 U.S. 48, 54-55 (1979), this assignment is valid as to Just Brakes even if it is void as to its creditors *Kahn v. Royal Banks of Missouri*, 790 S.W. 2nd 503, 506 [1,2] (Mo. App. 1990), *Loe v. Downing*, 325 S.W. 2nd 479, 482 [2] (Mo. 1959). State law controls this issue. *In Re: N.S. Garrott & Sons* 772 Fd. 2nd 462, 467 [7,8] (8th Cir. 1985).

The Circuit Court of St. Louis County ordered the sheriff to sell the trademark/service mark to satisfy the fraud judgment, and scheduled the sale for July 30, 1991. After the January 10, 1991 assignment of the trademark/service mark, Just Brakes, a corporation, had no assets of any significance. On July 30, 1991, immediately before the scheduled sheriff's sale, Just Brakes filed a petition in bankruptcy under Chapter 11. The sale did not proceed.

On September 24, 1991, the bankruptcy court dismissed the Chapter 11 petition, pursuant to a motion by petitioners, because reorganization was not feasible. The Circuit Court of St. Louis County again ordered the sale of the trademark/service mark to satisfy the fraud judgment, scheduling the sale for October 15, 1991. On October 15, 1991, immediately before the scheduled sale, Just Brakes filed the current, Chapter 7, bankruptcy case. The sheriff of St. Louis County proceeded with the sale and sold the trademark/service mark to Just Brakes of Texas (a separate corporation unrelated to Just Brakes) for $105,000.

Thereafter, at the request of the petitioners, the Circuit Court of St. Louis County issued a payout order and paid the net proceeds of the sale, $100,717, to petitioners Gary Robbins, *et. al.*, on October 24, 1991.

The bankruptcy trustee, David Sosne, filed two adversary complaints against the petitioners during September and October, 1992. One adversary complaint was dismissed by the trustee. The second adversary complaint was reduced to a claim that the petitioners violated the automatic stay, 11 U.S.C. §362, deleting all initial claims by the trustee to avoid the January 10, 1991 assignment of the trademark/service mark under 11 U.S.C.§§547 and 548 and to recover the proceeds under 11 U.S.C. §550.

The bankruptcy court held that petitioners willfully violated the automatic stay by collecting the proceeds of the sheriff's sale on October 24, 1991. App. 15a, 26a. The trustee abandoned all claims for avoidance of the January 10, 1991 assignment. The bankruptcy court concluded that the debtor and/or the bankruptcy estate held a property interest in the trademark/service mark in the form of a "claim for avoidance". App. 19a. The claim for avoidance was abandoned before entry of the judgment below which was based upon an alleged

willful violation of the automatic stay under 11 U.S.C. §362 (h).

The district court affirmed the bankruptcy court. App. 45a.

The Eighth Circuit reversed, holding that while the petitioners violated the automatic stay, no damages could have resulted unless and until the trustee actually prevailed on a claim for avoidance of the January 10, 1991 assignment. App. 12a-14a.

The Eighth Circuit felt it was not necessary to reach the issue of whether a potential claim for avoidance of a trustee constituted property of either the debtor or the bankruptcy estate under 11 U.S.C. §§541, 547, 548 and 550. App. 7a.

The statutes, 11 U.S.C. §§541, 547, 548 and 550 and the cases, *In Re: Morning Treat Coffee Co., Inc.*, 77 B.R. 62, 65 [4] (M.D. LA. 1987), *In Re: Springfield Furniture, Inc.*, 145 B.R. 520, 529 [6,7] (E.D. VA. 1992), *In Re: Jameson's Foods, Inc.*, 35 B.R. 433 [1] (D.S.C. 1983) all hold that a claim for avoidance is not the property of the debtor at the time the bankruptcy petition is filed and does not become the property of the bankruptcy estate until the trustee successfully pursues a claim for avoidance under 11 U.S.C. §§547 or 548 and thereafter recovers the proceeds under 11 U.S.C. §550.

In this case, under state law which applies, Just Brakes had no interest in the trademark and service mark at the time the bankruptcy petition was filed, when the trademark was sold and when the petitioners collected the proceeds of the sale, from October 15, 1991 through October 24, 1991. The trustee and the bankruptcy estate never acquired an interest in the trademark/service mark or its proceeds because the trustee never successfully litigated a claim for avoidance under 11 U.S.C. §§547 or 548 and never

successfully collected the proceeds of the trademark/service mark under 11 U.S.C. §550. The claims for avoidance and recovery, since dismissed, were not filed until September and October, 1992, almost a year after the petitioners collected the proceeds of the sheriff's sale.

The Eighth Circuit held that the petitioners violated the automatic stay by collecting property to satisfy a pre-petition judgment against the debtor at a time when neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate held an interest in that property.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

I. The Petition should be granted to clarify that 11 U.S.C. §362 does not automatically bar the collection of property in which neither the bankruptcy estate nor the debtor have an interest, because of the national importance of this issue in that the opinion below establishes that all parties are automatically barred from dealing in property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate holds an interest, thereby expanding the automatic stay beyond its intended scope.

The Eighth Circuit held the petitioners violated the automatic stay by collecting property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate had an interest, to satisfy a pre-petition judgment against the debtor. The Eighth Circuit concluded that such collection activities are barred by 11 U.S.C. §362 (a) (6) which stays any act to collect, assess or recover "a claim against the debtor". App. 7a. Petitioners respectfully submit that their collection activities were not "against the debtor" where the debtor had no interest in the trademark /service mark or its proceeds.

11 U.S.C. §362(a)(6) must be read together with 11 U.S.C. §362(a)(2) which provides that the *enforcement* of a pre-petition judgment must be *against* the debtor or bankruptcy estate, not merely that the pre-petition judgment, which is being enforced, be against the debtor.

The court should grant this petition because application of the automatic stay to bar actions against property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate has an interest potentially affects almost everyone. Anyone who deals in property that once passed through the hands of the debtor or which may subsequently be acquired by the trustee under subsequently filed claims for avoidance and recovery could be held liable for violating the automatic stay even though, at the time of his conduct, neither the bankruptcy estate nor the debtor held an interest in such property.

Petitioners respectfully submit that activity to satisfy a pre-petition judgment against the debtor, out of property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate has an interest, is not action *against the debtor*, since the debtor's interests are not affected by such activity.

The Eighth Circuit incorrectly interpreted the bankruptcy code to extend the scope of the bankruptcy court's power far beyond what was intended by Congress. Here the trustee did not seek an injunction under 11 U.S.C. §105 to bar dealings in the trademark/service mark and its proceeds until the trustee could pursue claims for avoidance and recovery under 11 U.S.C. §§547, 548 and 550. A §105 injunction would have been the appropriate relief for the trustee to seek under the facts of this case since neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate held an interest in the property in question. A request for a §105 injunction

would then submit to the discretion of the bankruptcy court the propriety of such relief on a case-by-case basis. The blanket application of an automatic stay to all property in which the debtor once held an interest or in which the bankruptcy estate may, in the future, acquire an interest is not only contrary to the bankruptcy code but is also unsound public policy.

II. The petition should be granted because the opinion below conflicts with, *Celotex Corp. v. Edwards*, 514 U.S. 300 and *Edwards v. Armstrong World Industries*, 6 F. 3d 312 (5th Cir. 1993), which provide that the automatic stay does not bar actions to satisfy pre-petition judgments against the debtor from property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate has an interest.

If the automatic stay barred the petitioners from collecting property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate held an interest, to satisfy a pre-petition judgment against the debtor, as the Eighth Circuit found, the central issue in *Celotex Corp. v. Edwards* would have been mooted. *Celotex Corporation v. Bennie Edwards*, 514 U.S. 300, 131 L. Ed. 2nd 403, 115 S. Ct. 1493 (1995) concerned the authority of the bankruptcy court to issue an injunction under 11 U.S.C. §105, in essentially identical circumstances, and the enforceability of that injunction. The court below held the automatic stay did not bar judgment creditors from satisfying a pre-petition judgment against the debtor from the proceeds of an appeal bond posted by the debtor before the bankruptcy petition was filed. The court below, *Edwards v. Armstrong World Industries, Inc.* 6 Fd. 3rd 312, 316, 317 [2-6] (5th Cir. 1993), held that the automatic stay did not bar the judgment creditors from collecting the proceeds of the appeal

bond to satisfy the pre-petition judgment *against the debtor*, the Celotex Corporation.

As in the case at bar, the pre-petition judgment was against the debtor, but the enforcement activities were directed against property in which neither the debtor nor bankruptcy estate held an interest. In that case, however, the Celotex Corporation had obtained a separate injunction under 11 U.S.C. §105 barring the judgment creditors from collecting the proceeds of the appeal bond. No such injunction was requested or issued in the case at bar.

Celotex did not appeal that part of the 5th Circuit judgment which held that the automatic stay did not apply. The Supreme Court opinion in *Celotex v. Edwards* is clearly premised upon the fact that the automatic stay did not bar Bennie Edwards from satisfying his pre-petition judgment against the debtor out of the proceeds of the appeal bond since the debtor no longer had an interest in the appeal bond proceeds once the judgment was affirmed. *Celotex Corp. v. Edwards* 514 U.S. 300, 131 L. Ed. 2nd 403, 115 S. Ct. 1493 (1995).

The opinion of the Eighth Circuit is diametrically opposed to *Edwards v. Armstrong World Industries, Inc.* 6 Fd. 3rd 312, 316 [2-6] (5th Cir. 1993) on the automatic stay issue and to *Celotex Corp. v. Edwards* 514 U.S. 300, 131 L. Ed. 2nd 403, 115 S. Ct. 1493 (1995) which would have been mooted by the Eighth Circuit's interpretation of 11 U.S.C.§362 (a)(6).

The court should grant this petition to resolve this conflict.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated, the petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX

United States Court of Appeals
FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT

No. 96-2078

In Re: Just Brakes Corporate Systems, Inc.,	*	
Debtor.	*	
David A. Sosne, Trustee,	*	
Plaintiff – Appellee.	*	Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri.
v.	*	
Reinert & Duree, P.C.; Gary Robbins; Robbins & Associates, Inc.; Estes & Estes, Inc.; James C. Landes,	*	
Defendants – Appellants.	*	

Submitted: December 11, 1996

Filed: March 13, 1997

Before FAGG, FLOYD R. GIBSON, and LOKEN, Circuit Judges.

LOKEN, Circuit Judge.

Appellants are judgment creditors of a Chapter 7 bankruptcy debtor, Just Brakes Corporate Systems, Inc. ("Just Brakes" or "debtor"). They appeal an order awarding Trustee David A. Sosne $100,717 in damages for appellants' willful violation of the automatic stay. See 11 U.S.C. § 362. We agree that appellants violated the automatic stay but conclude that the damage award was an improper remedy and therefore reverse.

I. Background

In 1988, appellants obtained a state court judgment against Just Brakes for $104,583.33. In January 1991, Just Brakes assigned its only valuable asset, a registered trademark, to FGR Management, Inc. ("FGR"). Appellants promptly attacked the transfer as a fraudulent conveyance. The state court agreed, enjoined Just Brakes and FGR from further transfers, and scheduled a foreclosure sale of the trademark to satisfy appellants' judgment. Five minutes before that sale, Just Brakes petitioned for Chapter 11

protection and asserted its own claim to recover the trademark. The foreclosure sale was cancelled.

Appellants persuaded the bankruptcy court to dismiss the Chapter 11 case as "essentially a single asset reorganization case." In dismissing, the court observed that Just Brakes's claim to avoid its pre-petition assignment of the trademark to FGR "is an asset of the Bankruptcy estate," and that the rights of Just Brakes and others asserting claims to the trademark could be adequately protected at less cost in state court.

The parties then returned to state court, and the court scheduled a foreclosure sale of the trademark at noon on October 15, 1991. That morning, Just Brakes filed this Chapter 7 petition. Though notified of the filing, the state court allowed the sale to proceed, ordering that its proceeds be held in escrow while the parties "exhausted their legal remedies contesting the validity of the . . . sale, or until

further order of court."[1] Nine days later, in the action here at issue, appellants applied to the state court and were granted pay-out of the net sale proceeds, $100,717, without obtaining relief from the Chapter 7 automatic stay.

One year later, the Trustee sued to recover the sale proceeds for the bankruptcy estate, attacking debtor's January 1991 assignment of the trademark as a fraudulent conveyance, see 11 U.S.C. § 548, and seeking damages from appellants for willful violation of the automatic stay. When appellants demanded a jury trial of the avoidance issues, the Trustee dismissed that claim, and the district court remanded the case to the bankruptcy court for resolution of the "core" automatic stay issues.

The bankruptcy court granted summary judgment in favor of the Trustee. It found a violation of the automatic stay because appellants applied the trademark proceeds to their pre-petition judgment, knowing that debtor had asserted

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[1] No one challenged the state court's decision to complete the foreclosure sale, doubtless because the sale proceeds exceeded the value debtor

a claim to recover that asset. Turning to the question of remedy, the court concluded that it may award "[c]ompensation and punishment" for willful violation of the automatic stay in a contempt proceeding, and may also award money damages under its broad §105 (a) power to issue "necessary or appropriate" orders. It awarded as the "appropriate measure" of damages the $100,717 appellants received from the foreclosure sale. The district court affirmed. Appellants challenge the decision that they violated the automatic stay and the damage award.

II. Violation of the Automatic Stay

Appellants argue that they did not violate the automatic stay when they collected the foreclosure sale proceeds because Just Brakes transferred its entire interest in the trademark in January 1991, and state law does not allow the transferor to avoid a fraudulent conveyance. Acknowledging that the Trustee asserts a claim to recover the trademark for the Chapter 7 estate, appellants argue that

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placed on the trademark in its Chapter 7 schedules.

claim is neither "property of the estate" nor "property of the debtor" within the meaning of §§ 362 (a) (2) - (5) *until the Trustee has actually recovered the property.* Thus, the Trustee's only remedy is to enjoin appellants' collection efforts under §105 (a) of the Code, as was done in Celotex Corp. v. Edwards, 115 S.Ct. 1493, 1498-1500 (1995).

The nature of debtor's present interest in the trademark is an interesting question[2] but one that we need not resolve because, by collecting the foreclosure sale proceeds, appellants violated § 362 (a) (6), which provides:

> [A] petition filed under . . . this title . . . operates as a stay . . . of (6) any act to collect, assess, or recover a claim against the debtor that arose before the commencement of the case under this title.

Here, the trademark was sold to satisfy appellants' pre-petition "claim against the debtor" – their 1988 judgment. After the sale, appellants applied to the state court and

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[2] We note that property of the bankruptcy estate is broadly defined in § 541 (a) (1) of the Code. See United States v. Whiting Pools, Inc., 462 U.S. 198, 204-205 & n.9 (1983). But the nature and extent of the debtor's interest in property is governed by state law. See Butner v. United States, 440 U.S. 48, 54-55 (1979).

received the sale proceeds out of escrow, clearly an "act to collect" on their judgment. See Valley Transit Mix of Ruidoso, Inc. v. Miller, 928 F.2d 354, 356 (10th Cir. 1991). This act prejudiced the Trustee's ability to litigate a competing avoidance claim on behalf of all creditors and was therefore inconsistent with the basic purpose of the automatic stay, "to prevent creditors from stealing a march on each other." Brown v. Armstrong, 949 F.2d 1007, 1010 (8th Cir. 1991) (quotation omitted).[3] The bankruptcy court correctly concluded that appellants violated the automatic stay.

III. The Appropriate Remedy

The Trustee urged the bankruptcy court to award money damages under § 362 (h), which provides that "[a]n individual injured by any willful violation of [the automatic stay] shall recover actual damages, including costs and

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[3] This factor distinguishes this case from cases holding that § 362 (a) (6) does not automatically stay post-petition acts to collect creditors' *independent* claims against debtors' guarantors. See In re Alcom Corp., 154 B.R. 97, 115-116 (Bankr. D.D.C. 19[illegible], subsequent history

attorneys' fees, and, in appropriate circumstances, may recover punitive damages." The bankruptcy court ruled that §362 (h) only applies to "individual" debtors, not to corporate entities such as Just Brakes. We agree.[4] As the Second Circuit persuasively explained, this construction of § 362 (h) is required by the plain meaning of the word "individual," as used in the Bankruptcy Code, supported by the fact that § 362 (h) was added to the Code as part of the "Consumer Credit Amendments" of 1984. See In re Chateaugay Corp., 920 F.2d 183, 186-87 (2d Cir. 1990); accord In re Goodman, 991 F.2d 613, 619 (9th Cir. 1993); In re Calstar, Inc., 159 B.R. 247, 260 Bankr. D. Minn. 1993). We reject earlier, contrary circuit decisions that did not give adequate weight to the statute's plain meaning. See In re Atl. Bus. & Community Corp., 901 F.2d 325, 329 (3d Cir.

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omitted); In re Advanced Ribbons & Office Prods., Inc., 125 B.R. 259, 265 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 1991).

[4] This court has not previously addressed the issue. In Lovett v. Honeywell, 930 F.2d 625 (8th Cir. 1991), we assumed that § 362 (h) damages could be awarded to a corporate debtor and affirmed the denial of damage relief.

1990); Budget Serv. Co. v. Better Homes of Va., Inc., 804 F.2d 289, 292 (4th Cir. 1986).

Having denied the Trustee § 362 (h) damages, the bankruptcy court went on to conclude that it may compensate *and punish* for a willful violation of the automatic stay under its inherent contempt powers, or its broad § 105 (a) power to "issue any order, process, or judgment that is necessary or appropriate to carry out the provisions of this title." But the power to punish for a statutory violation is a criminal law power. It must be expressly conferred by Congress, and its exercise is often subject to the procedural safeguards that protect the criminally accused. Even the judicial power to punish for criminal contempt of a court order is carefully distinguished from the power to remedy a violation of that order through civil contempt. See, e.g., Shillitani v. United Sates, 384 U.S. 364, 368-72 (1966); Combs v. Ryan's Coal Co., 785 F.2d 970, 981 (11th Cir.), cert. denied, 479 U.S. 853 (1986). We conclude that Congress has conferred no power to punish for

a violation of § 362 (a), other than the punitive damage authority in § 362 (h).

On the other hand, we agree that bankruptcy courts have broad equitable powers to remedy violations of the automatic stay that injure a corporate debtor's estate. Many courts have said that those who violate the automatic stay "may be held in contempt." In re Computer Commun., Inc., 824 F.2d 725, 731 (9th Cir. 1987). Calling this remedial power contempt overlooks a serious question whether bankruptcy courts have contempt powers after the 1984 Amendments. Compare In re Sequoia Auto Brokers, Ltd., 827 F.2d 1281, 1290 (9th Cir. 1987), with In re Skinner, 917 F.2d 444, 448-50 (10th Cir. 1990). More narrowly, it overlooks the fact that contempt is a remedy for violating court orders, not statutes. See In re Calstar, 159 B.R. at 257-58. Finally, even if a civil contempt power exists, we see little if any need to resort to it in this context because § 362 (a), buttressed by § 105 (a), confers broad equitable power to remedy adverse effects of automatic stay violations. See

Celotex, 115 S.Ct. at 1498-99 & n.6; In re Taco Ed's, Inc., 63 B.R. 913, 931-32 (Bankr. N.D. Ohio 1986).

Having limited the scope of the bankruptcy court's remedial powers, we encounter a problem with the remedy awarded in this case, for neither the bankruptcy court nor the district court clarified whether the damages awarded[5] were compensatory or punitive. Thus, we must examine whether the bankruptcy court's award – the "value of the voidable transfer that resulted from the violation of the automatic stay" –was properly compensatory.

The bankruptcy court relied upon In re Calstar in awarding the Trustee the value of the trademark as determined by the foreclosure sale. But in Calstar, the bankruptcy court held that the assets in question were part of the debtor's estate *before* ruling that their value was the appropriate remedy for violation of the stay. See 159 B.R. at 252-53. Here, by contrast, the Trustee has never established

his right to avoid debtor's pre-petition transfer and recover the trademark or its value for the estate. Indeed, the Trustee dismissed his adversary avoidance claims so that he could pursue this § 362 claim in the bankruptcy court. Thus, the value of the trademark is not an appropriate compensatory remedy. At this stage of the proceedings, the Trustee's rights are preserved if appellants are ordered to pay the foreclosure sale proceeds (including interest on the proceeds from October 24, 1991) into escrow pending determination of whether those proceeds now belong to appellants, or to debtor's estate.

In making its damage award, the bankruptcy court observed that appellants' violation of the automatic stay "required the Trustee to incur the additional expense of litigating these actions." But the court made no effort to quantify this expense. In vacating the $100,717 award and substituting an order to pay the proceeds into escrow, we do

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[5] Damages are not an equitable remedy. Because Congress in § 362 (h) did not grant authority to award damages to corporate debtors, only

not foreclose the bankruptcy court from returning to the question of remedy after the avoidance issues are finally resolved. For example, if the Trustee proves that the trademark proceeds belong in the debtor's estate, then the appellants' violation of the automatic stay has needlessly cost the estate delay and litigation expense. On the other hand, if the Trustee fails to prove his avoidance claim, then the Trustee has pursued a lost cause, and the expense he incurred is a self-inflicted wound.

For the foregoing reasons, the district court's March 29, 1996, order is reversed and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.

A true copy.

Attest:

Clerk, U.S. COURT OF APPEALS,

EIGHTH CIRCUIT.

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compensatory equitable remedies are appropriate.

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI
EASTERN DIVISION

In re	)	
	)	
JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS, INC.,	)	Adv. No. 92-4384-172
Debtor,	)	
	)	
DAVID A. SOSNE, TRUSTEE,	)	Case No. 91-46618-172
Plaintiff,	)	CHAPTER 7 PROCEEDING
vs.	)	
	)	
REINERT & DUREE, P.C. n/k/a REINERT, DUREE & COLLINS, P.C., GARY ROBBINS, ROBBINS & ASSOCIATES, INC., ROBBINS & ROBBINS ASSOCIATES, INC., ESTES & ESTES, INC., ESTES & ESTES, INC., and JAMES C. LANDES,	)	PUBLISHED
Defendants.	)	

ORDER

At Saint Louis, in this District, this 11th day of July, 1994.

The matters being considered here are the several pretrial requests filed by the Trustee/Plaintiff and by the several Defendants. For the purposes of this Order, the matters have been grouped together as follows:

1. Plaintiff's Amended Motion for Summary Judgment (Document No. 24); Plaintiff's Memorandum in Support of Summary Judgment (Documents No. 30 and 31); Affidavit in Support of Summary Judgment (Document No. 29); Plaintiff's Memorandum in Opposition to Amended Motion for Summary Judgment (Document No. 37).

2. Defendants' "Jury Demand, Motion to Withdraw Reference to the Bankruptcy Court, and Answer to the Amended Complaint" (Document No. 25); Plaintiff's Motion for Sanctions (Document No. 33); Defendants' Response to Plaintiff's Motion for Sanctions (Document No. 38); Plaintiff's Reply to Defendants' Response to Plaintiff's Motion for Sanctions (Document No. 40).

3. Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment (Document No. 35); Plaintiff's Memorandum in Support of Summary Judgment (Document No. 36); Defendants' Response in Opposition to Plaintiff's Summary Judgment (Document No. 39).

This Adversary Proceeding is based upon the Chapter 7 Trustee's Amended Complaint to Enforce the Stay and to Assess Damages for Willful Violation of the Stay, filed on March 29, 1994. The Trustee is also a Plaintiff in a lawsuit pending before the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri. Some of the Defendants here are Defendants in the District Court lawsuit which concerns allegedly fraudulent or preferential transfers of a trademark. In general, this Adversary Proceeding and the District Court lawsuit address different portions of the continuing series of activities involving the transfer of the Debtor's trademark.

This is a core proceeding pursuant to Section 157 (b) (2) (A), (G) and (O) of Title 28 of the United States Code. The Court has jurisdiction over the parties and this matter

pursuant to 28 U.S.C. Sections 151, 157 and 1334, and Rule 29 of the Local Rules of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri.

On consideration of the record as a whole, the Court announced its determinations and orders from the bench to the Attorneys for the Plaintiff and the Defendants at a pretrial conference on July 6, 1994.

The Plaintiff's Amended Complaint alleges that after the Debtor filed its Chapter 7 Petition on October 15, 1991, and with actual knowledge of the filing, the Defendants willfully and intentionally continued their efforts to collect a prepetition, non-bankruptcy court judgment. These postpetition efforts included a Sheriff's sale of the Debtor's service mark, trademark and trade name "Just Brakes" and the associated goodwill and all other assets of Just Brakes Corporate Systems, Inc.; prosecution of a request for an order of pay-out of the proceeds of the sums received at the Sheriff's sale; receipt of these sums in the amount of $100,717.00; and application of these sums in satisfaction of

a prepetition debt. The Plaintiff has argued further that the basis for this series of postpetition collection activity is a transfer which occurred when the Defendants obtained the nonbankruptcy court order that directed the Sheriff to levy and seize upon the Debtor's personal property. This transfer is the subject of the Plaintiff's avoidance lawsuit in the District Court.

In an earlier Chapter 11 case in which this Debtor was a Debtor-In-Possession, the Bankruptcy Court entered an order that concluded in part that

> "... the Debtor held and continues to hold an interest in the trademark which is its claim for the avoidance of the pre-petition [Chapter 11] assignment to [another entity]. This claim is an asset of the [Chapter 11] Bankruptcy estate.

In re Just Brakes Corporate Systems, Inc., Case No. 91-44835-172, Motions A, C and D, Document No. 34, September 24, 1991.

Although the Chapter 11 case was dismissed on or about September 24, 1991, the Debtor's claim for the

avoidance of the prepetition (Chapter 11) assignment of the trademark survived to the extent that recovery was also available under nonbankruptcy law.

As of the commencement of this Chapter 7 case on October 15, 1991, the Debtor's estate included its claims for the avoidance of the assignment of the mark, as well as any new Chapter 7 claim for avoidance such as those pleaded in the District Court action. These claims are property of the Bankruptcy estate. 11 U.S.C. Section 541.

Pursuant to 11 U.S.C. Section 362(a), the petition filed in this matter operates as a stay of the enforcement against property of the estate of a judgment obtained before the commencement of the case; as a stay of any act to obtain possession of property of the estate from the estate or to exercise control over property of the estate; as a stay of any act to perfect or enforce any lien against property of the estate; as a stay of any act to perfect or enforce against property of the debtor any lien to the extent that such lien secures a prepetition claim; and any act to collect, assess, or

recover a claim against the debtor that arose before the commencement of the case.

The Defendants' postpetition actions with respect to the sale of the trademark and the interests therein of the Debtor and of the Bankruptcy estate, the collection of the proceeds, and the application of the proceeds to the prepetition debt were in violation of the automatic stay. The Defendants have not been granted relief from the automatic stay in this case. **See In re Abrams**, 127 B.R. 239 (9th Cir. BAP 1991).

A court is to render judgment forthwith on a motion for summary judgment, if the pleadings, deposition, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the affidavits show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to a judgment as a matter of law. Rule 56, Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, made applicable here by Rule 7056, Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure. The Court has determined that on the allegation that the Defendants violated the

automatic stay, the Plaintiff is entitled to judgment on his motion for summary judgment. **See Sartor v. Arkansas Natural Gas Corp.**, 321 U.S. 620 (1944).

In these pleadings, and in the answer to the amended complaint, the Defendants have denied that they willfully violated the automatic stay. The Plaintiff's request for a money judgment is based upon the allegation that the Defendants willfully violated the automatic stay. Therefore, there is a genuine issue as to material facts, and neither party is entitled to judgment on their motions for summary judgment on this issue.

The narrow issue of whether or not the Defendants' violation of the automatic stay was willful may be determined in a bench trial in the Bankruptcy Court on the Plaintiff's amended adversary complaint. This issue is not one to which the parties are entitled to a trial by jury. It is, therefore, possible that this issue might be tried on the limited questions of willfulness and damages without

invading the matters that are pending before the United States District Court in the jury trial matter.

It has been suggested, however, that a more comprehensive disposition of these matters would result from a procedure that allowed the jury trial to be concluded before these issues are tried in the Bankruptcy Court. Such an approach might be a more efficient use of judicial resources if not all of the issues can be finally determined in this Court. The parties have been directed to attempt to resolve all outstanding matters as part of global settlement. If such attempts are unsuccessful, the parties are to return to this Court at the hearing set herein and suggest a procedure that will be in the best interests of all parties.

IT IS ORDERED that these pretrial matters are concluded; and

That to the extent that these matters have not previously been ruled upon, the Plaintiff's motion for leave to file an amended complaint (Motion 27) is granted; and

That the Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment (Motion No. 31) and Amended Motion for Summary Judgment (Motion 24) are denied; and

That further action on the Defendants' Motion to Withdraw the Reference of this Adversary Proceeding (Motion 25) shall be stayed pending the parties' announcements at the continued pretrial hearing; and that the matter shall remain in the Bankruptcy Court until said hearing; and

That the Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment (Motion 35) is granted in part; and that on the Plaintiff's Amended Complaint, judgment is entered in part for the Plaintiff and against the Defendants; and that Defendants' actions after the commencement of this case as described in the Amended Complaint were in violation of the automatic stay of 11 U.S.C. Section 362; and that said Motion for Summary Judgment is denied as to the remaining issues which are to be determined at trial; and

That the determination of the Plaintiff's Motion for Sanctions is passed for such other and further proceedings as may be required; and

That this matter is continued and reset for **September 6, 1994 at 10:00 a.m. in Bankruptcy Courtroom No. 1, U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Eastern District of Missouri, One Metropolitan Square, 211 North Broadway, 7th Floor, St. Louis, Missouri** as a continued pretrial hearing

JAMES A BARTA
U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

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Ann R. Sachar
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UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI
EASTERN DIVISION

In re	)	
	)	
JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS, INC.,	)	Adv. No. 92-4384-172
Debtor,	)	
	)	
DAVID A. SOSNE, TRUSTEE,	)	Case No. 91-46618-172
Plaintiff,	)	CHAPTER 7 PROCEEDING
vs.	)	
	)	
REINERT & DUREE, P.C. n/k/a REINERT, DUREE & COLLINS, P.C., GARY ROBBINS, ROBBINS & ASSOCIATES, INC., ESTES & ESTES, INC., and JAMES C. LANDES,	)	PUBLISHED
Defendants.	)	

ORDER

At Saint Louis, in this District, this 30th day of November, 1994.

On consideration of the record as a whole, and consistent with the determinations set out in the Memorandum entered in this Adversary Proceeding

IT IS ORDERED that this matter is concluded; and that this Order is the Final Order of the Bankruptcy Court in this Adversary Proceeding; and

That the motion for summary judgment, dated April 15, 1994, on behalf of David A. Sosne, Trustee/Plaintiff ("Plaintiff") is sustained; and that the motion for summary judgment, filed on March 29, 1994, on behalf of Reinert, Duree, P.C. n/k/a Reinert, Duree & Collins, P.C., Gary Robbins, Robbins & Associates, Inc., Estes & Estes, Inc., and James C. Landes, ("Defendants") is overruled; and

That judgment on the Plaintiff's Amended Complaint is entered in favor of the Plaintiff and against the Defendants jointly and severally; and that as and for judgment in this matter, the Defendants are to pay to the Plaintiff the sum of $100,717.00, for the willful violation of the automatic stay, pursuant to Sections 105(a) and 362 of Title 11 of the United

States Code, and that unless otherwise specifically ordered to the contrary, all other requests in this proceeding are denied; and that the Defendants' requests to withdraw the reference of this matter are deemed withdrawn.

JAMES J. BARTA
U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

Copy mailed to:

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UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI
EASTERN DIVISION

In re	)	
	)	
JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS, INC.,	)	Adv. No. 92-4384-172
Debtor,	)	
	)	
DAVID A. SOSNE, TRUSTEE,	)	Case No. 91-46618-172
Plaintiff,	)	CHAPTER 7 PROCEEDING
vs.	)	
	)	
REINERT & DUREE, P.C. n/k/a REINERT, DUREE & COLLINS, P.C., GARY ROBBINS, ROBBINS & ASSOCIATES, INC., ESTES & ESTES, INC., and JAMES C. LANDES,	)	PUBLISHED
Defendants.	)	

MEMORANDUM

At Saint Louis, in this District, this 30th day of November, 1994.

This Memorandum addresses the Trustee's Motion for Summary Judgment dated September 19, 1994, and the

Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment filed on October 6, 1994. The determinations and orders in this matter are entered after a consideration of the record as a whole.

This Adversary Proceeding is based upon an Amended Complaint to Enforce the Stay and to Assess Damages for Willful Violation of the Automatic Stay, filed by the Chapter 7 Trustee on March 29, 1994. This Adversary Proceeding and a District Court Jury Trial Proceeding addressed different portions of a continuing series of activities involving the transfer of the Debtor's trademark.

On July 11, 1994, the Bankruptcy Court entered an Order that decided a number of contested pretrial requests that had been filed by the Trustee/Plaintiff and by the several Defendants in this Adversary Proceeding. In part, the Court determined that the Defendants had violated the automatic stay of Section 362 of Title 11 of the United States Code. For the purpose of considering these Motions for Summary Judgment, the Findings, Conclusions and Orders set out in

the Order dated July 11, 1994 are incorporated and adopted herein as though fully set forth. An issue that could not be decided in the earlier pretrial matters was whether or not the Defendants' violation of the automatic stay was willful. This determination was deferred until after either a bench trial in the Bankruptcy Court on the Plaintiff's Amended Complaint, or upon some other mechanism as may be agreed upon by the parties. The parties have elected to submit the entire Adversary Proceeding and all unresolved issues to the Bankruptcy Court in the form of the Motions for Summary Judgment, without a further Court hearing or trial.

A brief review of the pertinent facts is helpful to this determination. On September 28, 1988, the Defendant, Reinert, Duree & Crane, P.C., on behalf of the other Defendants named in this Adversary Proceeding, recovered a judgment against the Debtor in the principal sum of $133,083.33 in the Circuit Court of St. Louis County, Missouri. On July 30, 1991, the Debtor filed a Petition for Reorganization under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code

(the first bankruptcy case). This Petition was filed five minutes prior to a Sheriff's sale of the Debtor's trademark pursuant to an order entered by a nonbankruptcy court. The filing of the petition under Chapter 11 operated as a stay of all collection activity on prepetition debt, including the Defendants' judgment, pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 362.

At the conclusion of a hearing on September 23, 1991, the Bankruptcy Court granted a motion filed on behalf of these Defendants, and dismissed the Chapter 11 case based upon a determination that further operations under Chapter 11 would result in a continuing loss to or diminution of the estate. A copy of the Court's written Order dated September 24, 1991 is attached hereto as Exhibit A. As part of the Findings and Conclusions in the first bankruptcy case, the Court determined that

> As of the commencement of this [Chapter 11] case, the Debtor held and continues to hold an interest in the trademark which is its claim for the avoidance of the prepetition [Chapter 11] assignment to [another corporate entity]. This claim is an asset of the [Chapter 11] bankruptcy estate.

In re Just Brakes Corporate Systems, Inc., Case No. 91-44835-172, Motions A, C and D, Document No. 34, pp. 3-4, September 24, 1991. A copy of this Order was mailed to the parties who are Defendants in this Adversary Proceeding.

After dismissal of the first Bankruptcy case, the nonbankruptcy court directed that a sale of the Debtor's assets be conducted at 12:00 Noon on October 15, 1991, to satisfy the Defendants' judgment. The Debtor filed the Chapter 7 petition that commenced this case at 9:12 a.m. on October 15, 1991. A file-stamped copy of the voluntary petition was faxed to the Defendants' law firm prior to the 12:00 p.m. foreclosure on October 15, 1991. **Affidavit of Nathan S. Cohen, Attorney at Law, Exhibit C, Trustee's Memorandum in Support of his Motion for Summary Judgments, Document No. 46, filed September 12, 1994, Case No. 91-46618-172, pp. 1-2.** Other members of the Defendants' law firm were given oral notice of the

commencement of the Bankruptcy case approximately fifty minutes after the Chapter 7 petition was filed. **Deposition of Robert West, Exhibit D, Trustee's Memorandum in Support of his Motion for Summery Judgement, Document No. 46, filed September 19, 1994, Case No. 91-46618-172, pp. 8-11, 13-15**.

The filing of the Chapter 7 petition operated as a stay of collection activity on prepetition debt.

The nonbankruptcy court ordered that the sale of the Debtor's assets was to go forward on the condition that the sale proceeds were to be held in escrow until the parties had exhausted their legal remedies contesting the validity of the October 15, 1991 sale, or until further order of court. **Exhibit E, Trustee's Memorandum In Support of his Motion for Summary Judgment, Document No. 46, filed September 19, 1994, Case No. 91-46618-172. p. 1**. The nonbankruptcy sale generated gross proceeds in the amount of $105,000.00.

On October 24, 1991, without having requested relief from the automatic stay, the Defendants sought and obtained a nonbankruptcy court order that directed the payout of the net sale proceeds to the Defendants. **Exhibits G and H, Trustee's Memorandum in Support of his Motion for Summary Judgment, Document No. 46, filed September 19, 1994, Case No. 91-46618-172**. A member of the law firm that is a Defendant here admitted that he had been aware of the Bankruptcy filing at some time prior to October 24, 1991. **Deposition of David M. Duree, July 22, 1994, Exhibit I Trustee's Memorandum in Support of his Motion for Summary Judgement, Document No. 46, filed September 19, 1994, Case No. 91-46618-172, p. 41**. The net amount of the sale proceeds received by the Defendants was $100,717.00.

On September 18, 1992, the Trustee commenced this Adversary Proceeding to enforce the automatic stay and for other relief. On July 11, 1994, the Bankruptcy Court sustained the Trustee's Motion for Summary Judgment in

part, finding that in the Chapter 7 case, the Defendants had violated the automatic stay.

> The Defendants' postpetition actions with respect to the sale of the trademark and the interests therein of the Debtor and of the Bankruptcy estate, the collection of the proceeds, and the application of the proceeds to the prepetition debt were in violation of the automatic stay. **Sosne v. Reinert & Duree, et al.**, Adversary No. 92-4384-172, Order dated July 11, 1994, Document No. 41.

The issue of the willfulness of the Defendants' actions was passed for later determination, and has now been submitted to the Court as part of the Motions for Summary Judgment. For purposes of this determination, the Bankruptcy Court need not decide the questions presented in the Trustee's lawsuit to set aside and recover the transfers under Sections 547 or 548 of Title 11.

A violation of the automatic stay is willful if a creditor acts deliberately with knowledge of the Bankruptcy petition. **Knaus v. Concordia Lumber Co. Inc.**, 889 F.2d 773 (8th Cir. 1989); **In re Burke**, 147 B.R. 955 (Bankr.

W.D.Mo. 1992). The Defendants in this case had actual knowledge of the commencement of this Chapter 7 case. The Defendants also knew that there had been a judicial determination that the Debtor had an interest in the trademark. Facts and circumstances existed at the commencement of this case which would alert an attorney to the conclusion that the trademark and the proceeds of the sale of the trademark were part of a bankruptcy estate, and that the estate held a claim as described in the Court's previous Order. **Burke**, 147 B.R. at 958.

The Bankruptcy Court finds and concludes that the Defendants' actions in violating the automatic stay of Section 362 were willful.

Actions taken in violation of the automatic stay are at least voidable. **In re Raymark Indus. Inc.**, 973 F.2d 1125, 1131 (3rd Cir. 1992); **In re Schwartz**, 954 F.2d 569, 571 (9th Cir. 1992); **Interstate Commerce Comm'n v. Holmes Transp., Inc.**, 931 F.2d 984, 987 (1st Cir. 1991).

In this matter, the Trustee has requested a money judgment in the amount of $105,000.00 pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 362(h) which permits an individual injured by any willful violation of a stay provided by Section 362 to recover actual damages and, in appropriate circumstances, punitive damages. This remedy is not available to a corporate entity. See Johnston Environmental Corp. v. Knight, 991 F.2d 613, 619 (9th Cir. 1993); In re Chateaugay Corp., 920 F.2d 183, 186 (2d Cir. 1990); In re U.S. Abatement Corp., 150 B.R. 381 (Bankr. E.D.La. 1993); In re Calstar, Inc., 159 B.R. 247 (Bankr. D.Minn. 1993). In this case, the Trustee is not acting in his individual capacity, but rather on behalf of the Bankruptcy estate of a corporate entity. Therefore, relief in the form of a money judgment to an individual under Section 362(h) is not available to the Trustee.

Nonetheless, an aggrieved entity is generally not without a remedy before a court of equity. Pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 105(a), the Court may issue any order that is necessary or appropriate to carry out the provisions of Title

11. In the circumstances presented here, the Trustee, on behalf of the Bankruptcy estate, is entitled to a judgment against the Defendants based upon the Defendants' willful violation of the automatic stay. Compensation and punishment for willful violation of the automatic stay may also be awarded in a contempt proceeding; but such a proceeding is not the exclusive relief available to a trustee.

A Chapter 7 trustee is charged with the responsibility of liquidating the assets of a bankruptcy estate for the benefit of creditors. See 11 U.S.C. § 704. The Defendants' willful violation of the automatic stay has not only prevented the Trustee from liquidating the asset, but it has also required the Trustee to incur the additional expense of litigating these actions. Therefore, a money judgment in favor of the Trustee is necessary to carry out the provisions of Title 11.

An appropriate measure of the amount of the money judgment here is the value of the voidable transfer that resulted from the violation of the automatic stay. As a result of their postpetition collection activity in violation of the

automatic stay, the Defendants received the amount of $100,717.00 (representing the gross sale proceeds less the Sheriff's commission). The Trustee, therefore, is entitled to a judgment against these Defendants in the amount of $100,717.00. See. Calstar, 159 B.R. 247.

The Defendants have argued that creditors of the current bankruptcy estate include only the individuals who managed the entity against which the prepetition judgment was obtained, and the attorneys and other parties.[1] Thus, according to the Defendants, a money judgment in this Adversary Proceeding would ultimately transfer money to the parties who assisted the Debtor in committing the acts that were the basis for the Defendants' judgment. However, these allegations may be presented as objections to the claims pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 502, or by some other means,

[1] Although no claims bar date has been set, a review of the Court file has revealed that a proof of claim has been filed on behalf of each of the following creditors: IRS in the amount of $5,000.00; Southwestern Bell Yellow Pages in the amount of $24,244.12.

but are not ripe for a determination in this Adversary Proceeding.

One of the most powerful protections available to a Chapter 7 Debtor is that afforded by the automatic stay of section 362. It is intended to temporarily suspend collection activity, and to allow the trustee to identify and liquidate assets of the estate. The proceeds of the liquidation are then to be distributed equitably to **all** holders of allowed claims, *pro rata* if necessary, according to the priorities established by the Bankruptcy Code. A violation of the automatic stay frustrates this scheme, disturbs the orderly distribution of assets, and in some instances forever removes an asset from administration by a bankruptcy trustee. The trustee has the obligation to attempt to reimpose the balance and impartiality that results from a willful violation of the stay.

Pursuant to Rule 56(c) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, made applicable here by Rule 7056, Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure, summary judgment is appropriate if the pleadings, depositions, answers to

interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact, and that the moving party is entitled to a judgment as a matter of law. As presented here, there is no genuine issue as to any material fact, and the Plaintiff is entitled to a judgment as a matter of law.

As part of this Adversary Proceeding the Plaintiff had filed two motions for sanctions, arguing that he is entitled to recover attorneys' fees and costs incurred as a result of the Defendants refiling a jury demand and a motion to withdraw the reference; and fees and costs incurred in defending against the Defendants' motion for summary judgment, all after similar motions and requests had been denied by various courts. The number of requests, replies, memoranda and other documents that has been filed in these adversary proceedings has been large compared to similar proceedings in the bankruptcy court. Some of the later requests and responses appear to duplicate or restate requests or responses that had been previously determined. Partially as a result of

the uncertainty that continued to exist with respect to the extent of the Bankruptcy Court's jurisdiction prior to enactment of the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1994, the Defendants' requests here generally did not insist upon a position after it was no longer tenable. Although many of the Defendants' arguments could have been presented more succinctly, and some should have been raised more promptly, it cannot be said that in defending their legal position, they acted in bad faith.

The unfortunate result of these actions is that the administration of a Chapter 7 case has been delayed and the expenses of administration have been increased. The overall consequence may be that little or no distribution will be available for general creditors. The Plaintiff's two motions for sanctions will be denied. The Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment will be sustained and a money judgment will be entered against the Defendants.

JAMES J. BART
U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI
EASTERN DIVISION

In Re: JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS	)	
Debtor.	)	
DAVID A. SOSNE, TRUSTEE Plaintiff/Appellee,	)	) No. 4:95 cv) 226 SNL
vs.	)	
REINERT & DUREE, P.C., et al., Defendants/Appellants.	)	

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

This matter is before the Court on Reinert & Duree, P.C.'s (Reinert) appeal from the bankruptcy court's decision to grant summary judgment in favor of the bankruptcy trustee. Once a party is in bankruptcy, federal regulations impose an automatic stay that prohibits the collection of pre-bankruptcy judgments. Reinert collected on a pre-bankruptcy judgment against Just Brakes while an automatic stay was in force. The Court is presented with the question of whether this collection violated the stay and, if that is the

case, whether the bankruptcy court had authority to award damages for the willful violation.

On an appeal, the district court may affirm, modify, or reverse a judgment or order of the bankruptcy court. This Court may affirm the decision if it is supported by law and the facts contained in the record. Findings of fact will not be set aside unless clearly erroneous and witness credibility decisions will not be second-guessed. In re Van Horne, 823 F.2d 1285, 1297 (8th Cir. 1987); In re Martin, 761 F.2d 472, 474 (8th Cir. 1985). Under Bankruptcy Rule 8013, findings of fact are clearly erroneous when they are not supported by substantial evidence, contrary to the clear preponderance of the evidence, or based on an erroneous view of the law. In re Cook, 72 B.R. 976 (W.D. MO. 1987). Conclusions of law are subject to *de novo* review by this Court.

The facts of this case have been set out in the court below and need be only briefly revisited. The Appellant is the law firm of Reinert & Duree, P.C. On September 28, 1988, Reinert recovered a judgment in Circuit Court for the

City of St. Louis for $133,083.33 against the debtor, Just Brakes. After an initial Chapter 11 filing by Just Brakes was dismissed, the company refiled in Chapter 7. In the period between the dismissal of the Chapter 11 proceeding and the Chapter 7 proceeding, Reinert had petitioned the circuit court to order the sheriff to hold an auction. The circuit court ordered an auction but when they found out about the Chapter 7 filing, the court ordered the money from the sale to be put in escrow. On October 24, 1991, without requesting relief from the automatic stay, Reinert petitioned the circuit court to pay out the proceeds and Reinert received $100,717.00.

Following that disbursement, the Chapter 7 Trustee commenced a proceeding in bankruptcy court to enforce the automatic stay. The bankruptcy court found that Reinert violated the stay and made the additional finding that its violation was willful. The bankruptcy court ordered Reinert to pay back the $100,717.00 for willful violation of the

automatic stay pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 105 (a) and 11 U.S.C. § 362.

The bankruptcy court found that there was no dispute that the sheriff's sale against Just Brakes was to satisfy the pre-petition judgment. The automatic stay provisions of § 362 are clear: "A petition filed under 310, 302, or 303 of this title . . . operates as a stay . . . of . . .the enforcement, against the debtor or against the property of the estate, of a judgment obtained before commencement of the case." Despite Reinert's misleading statements about the nature of the property that was sold, the Court finds no reason to disagree with the bankruptcy court on their finding.

The second challenge to the bankruptcy court's decision is the finding that the violation was willful. The Court approves the bankruptcy court's findings of fact regarding this issue. Reinert knew that the stay was in effect and acted deliberately to seek the pre-petition judgment funds. The legal standard for willfulness is clear: "A willful violation of the automatic stay occurs when the creditor acts

deliberately with knowledge of the bankruptcy petition." In re Knaus, 889 F.2d 773, 775 (8th Cir. 1989). The Court finds that the bankruptcy court correctly applied this standard and awarded damages in the proper amount. An award of damages is proper because a court has inherent power to enforce its own orders; this stay operates in the same general manner. 11 U.S.C. 105 (a); In re Calstar, Inc., 159 B.R. 247, 260 (Bkrtcy.D.Minn. 1993).

Reinert's final argument is a false issue. They argue that they were entitled to a jury trial. Their actions, however, were in such clear violation of the law that the ruling on summary judgment meant that they were not entitled to any trial-jury or nonjury.

Accordingly,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the ruling of the bankruptcy court is **AFFIRMED**.

Dated this 29th day of March, 1996.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT

No. 96-2078EMSL

Reinert & Duree, P.C.,	*	
	*	
Appellants,	*	Order Denying Petition
	*	for Rehearing and
vs.	*	Suggestion for
	*	Rehearing En Banc
David A. Sosne,	*	
	*	
Appellee.	*	

The suggestion for rehearing en banc is denied. The petition for rehearing by the panel is also denied.

April 14, 1997

Order Entered at the Director of the Court:

Clerk, U.S. Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit

97 7

Supreme Court, U.S.
F I L E D
SEP 30 1997
CLERK

No. 96-2045

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER TERM, 1996

REINERT & DUREE, P.C., GARY ROBBINS, ROBBINS & ASSOCIATES, INC., ESTES & ESTES, INC. AND JAMES C. LANDES,

Petitioners,

v.

DAVID A. SOSNE, BANKRUPTCY TRUSTEE FOR JUST BRAKES CORPORATE SYSTEMS, INC., DEBTOR,

Respondent.

On Petition For Writ Of Certiorari To The United States Court Of Appeals For The Eight Circuit

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION

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Celotex Corp., v. Edwards,
514 U.S. 300, 131 L.Ed. 2nd. 403,
115 S.Ct. 1493(1995).....1, 3, 5

Edwards v. Armstrong World Industries, Inc.,
6 F.3rd. 312 (5th Cir. 1993).....1, 3

Statues Cited
11 U.S.C. §105.....3
11 U.S.C. §362.....1, 2, 3, 4

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This petition is one of two petitions seeking a Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. The Respondent has heretofore filed its Petition for Writ of Certiorari (hereinafter referred to as "Respondent's Petition") in the proceeding styled *David A. Sosne, Trustee v. Reinert & Duree, P.C., et al.*, which has been assigned Cause No. 97-7 by this Court. The Respondent's Petition contains a concise statement of the case, setting forth the facts material to the consideration of the questions presented by the Eighth Circuit decision. To avoid repetition, this Court is respectfully referred to the Respondent's Petition filed in said related proceeding, and the Respondent will confine this brief to the separate questions raised by the Petitioners in this proceeding.

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

Contrary to the argument of the Petitioners, the decision below does not establish a rule "...that all parties are automatically barred from dealing in property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate holds an interest..." Rather, the Eighth Circuit held that proceeding with a foreclosure action against the Debtor after the filing of a bankruptcy petition was a violation of the automatic stay provisions of 11 U.S.C §362. The decision of the Eighth Circuit for which the Petitioners seek a Writ of Certiorari is not in conflict with Celotex Corp. v. Edwards, 514 U.S. 300, 131 L. Ed. 2nd. 403, 115 S.Ct. 1493 (1995) and Edwards v. Armstrong World Industries, Inc., 6 Fd. 3rd. 312 (5th Cir. 1993).

ARGUMENT

The Petitioners have submitted to this Court that their collection activities were not against the Debtor because the Debtor, allegedly, did not have an interest in the property the Petitioners levied upon and caused to be sold. The facts of the case clearly reflect otherwise and the issue of whether or not the Debtor had an interest in the property levied upon is irrelevant since the Petitioners continued with an action against the Debtor which was based solely upon a claim against the Debtor, conduct directly proscribed by 11 U.S.C. §362(a).

The Petitioners obtained a judgment against the Debtor in state court. The Petitioners also obtained an order from the state court barring the Debtor from transferring the asset upon which the Petitioners sought to levy. After the Debtor filed its Chapter 7 bankruptcy proceeding, the Petitioners continued with their collection activities and orchestrated the state court sale of the asset in question. The Debtor was a party to the state court ordered sale and the Debtor's interest in the asset in question was sold as part of that sale. The Petitioners argue that at the time of the filing of the bankruptcy proceeding the only asset of the Debtor's estate was a claim to avoid the sale of the trademark. Petitioners ignore that it was continuing an action against the Debtor by proceeding with the sheriff's sale and obtaining the proceeds.

Even if the Debtor did not have any interest in the asset sold, it is clear that the Debtor was a party to the State Court proceeding and that the Petitioners were attempting to collect a judgment against the Debtor. The Petitioners' argument is based entirely upon the false premise that its collection activities were not against the Debtor since,

allegedly, the Debtor had no interest in the property being sold. The Petitioners argued to the Eighth Circuit that they did not violate the automatic stay when they collected the sale proceeds because the Debtor did not have an interest in the assets sold. The Eighth Circuit held that the nature of the Debtor's interest in the property was irrelevant because, by continuing with the sale against the Debtor to collect their judgment against the Debtor, the Petitioners were acting to collect, assess or recover a claim against the Debtor in violation of the automatic stay provisions of §362(a)(6).

The Petitioners argue that the decision of the Eighth Circuit is in conflict with the case of Celotex Corp. v. Bennie Edwards, 514 U.S. 300, 131 L. Ed. 2nd 403, 115 S. Ct. 1493 (1995) and Edwards v. Armstrong World Industries, Inc., 6 Fd. 3rd 312 (5th Cir. 1993). The Respondent submits that these cases do not conflict with the decision of the Eighth Circuit rendered herein.

In Celotex v. Edwards the claimant sought to execute against a surety of Celotex (not directly against the debtor as in this proceeding) on a supersedeas bond. The supersedeas bond had been posted prior to the bankruptcy proceeding. The Court held that Celotex did not have a property interest in the bond at the time of the bankruptcy and therefore the provisions of 11 U.S.C. §362 did not prevent the claimant from executing against the surety. The question which was the focus of the Celotex v. Edwards case was whether the Bankruptcy Court had the authority to enjoin the claimant from executing on the supersedeas bond under 11 U.S.C. §105 when Celotex no longer had a property interest in the bond.

The Petitioners' argument has a fundamental flaw. It ignores the fact that its foreclosure action was against the

Debtor, not against a third party, such as the surety in Celotex. Regardless of the Debtor's interest in the property in question, the Petitioners proceeded with their execution against the Debtor. This act violates the plain language of §362(a)(6) which provides:

> [A] petition filed under...this title...operates as a stay... of (6) any act to collect, assess, or recover a claim against the debtor that arose before the commencement of the case under this title.

The Petitioners' execution against the Debtor also violates §362(a)(1) which provides:

> [A] petition filed under...this title...operates as a stay... of (1) the commencement or continuation, including the issuance or employment of process, of a judicial, administrative, or other action or proceeding against the debtor that was or could have been commenced before the commencement of the case under this title, or to recover a claim against the debtor that arose before the commencement of the case under this title.

The Eighth Circuit held that the actions of the Petitioners were clearly to collect on their judgment against the Debtor. The Eighth Circuit distinguished this case from the cases holding that §362(a)(6) does not automatically stay post-petition acts to collect creditors' independent claims against the debtors' guarantors. The distinguishing factor is that §362(a)(6) does not automatically stay post-petition acts to collect creditors' independent claims against debtors'

guarantors. See In re Alcom Corp., 154 B.R. 97, 115-116 (Bankr. D.D.C. 1993); In re Advanced Ribbons & Office Prods., Inc., 125 B.R. 259, 265 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 1991). In the case at hand, the Petitioners did not have a separate and independent claim against a third party surety. The Petitioners' only claim was directly against the Debtor. Therefore, there is no conflict between the Celotex line of cases and the decision of the Eighth Circuit in this matter.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the argument of the Petitioners, the decision of the Eighth Circuit for which the Petitioners seek a Writ of Certiorari does not establish the rule "...that all parties are automatically barred from dealing in property in which neither the debtor nor the bankruptcy estate holds an interest..." Contrary to the argument of the Petitioners, the decision of the Eighth Circuit does not conflict with Celotex v. Edwards.

WHEREFORE, the Respondent respectfully requests that this Court deny the Petitioners' Petition for a Writ of Certiorari.

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